

2018 Domestic Partner Changes Frequently Asked Questions



Background

Effective Jan. 1, 2018, for most union groups and all non-represented employees, domestic partners and their children will not be eligible for King County benefits, except for [state-registered domestic partners](#). Notification letters were mailed to impacted employees on May 5, 2017.

King County will continue to offer employee benefits to non-state-registered domestic partners and their children for the remainder of 2017.

King County previously extended employee benefits to the domestic partners of employees to correct an inequity in benefits provided to same-sex couples. This policy was enacted at a time when same-sex marriage was prohibited in Washington. However, a Supreme Court ruling granted same-sex couples the right to legally marry in all U.S. states in June 2015. Married same-sex couples are now eligible for the same benefits and tax advantages as other married couples.

King County and its labor unions determined that offering benefits only to state-registered domestic partners would create consistency with state law and help mitigate the effects of rising health care costs.

State-registered domestic partnerships are offered only when at least one of the partners is age 62 or older. Go to the Washington Secretary of State website for [more information](#) or to [declare a state registered domestic partnership](#).

Those whose King County benefits are ending Dec. 31, 2017, will have the opportunity to pay to continue health coverage through [COBRA](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. When does this change take effect?

A. Benefit coverage for non-registered domestic partners and the children of non-registered domestic partners ends on Dec. 31, 2017, including medical, dental, vision, pharmacy, life, AD&D, and LTD coverage.

Q. How do we register a Washington State domestic partnership?

A. To file a state-registered domestic partnership, at least one of the partners must be 62 years of age or older. The couple needs to complete the [Declaration of State Registered Domestic Partnership](#) on the Secretary of State website. The partners must sign the form in front of a notary public, obtain notarization, and submit the form and \$50 filing fee to the Secretary of State Corporations Division.

Q. How will the County confirm that my domestic partner is eligible for King County benefits?

A. You will need to provide copies of you and your partner's certificates or wallet cards issued by the state verifying your registered domestic partnership.

Q. If I get married before Jan. 1, 2018, is it considered a qualifying life event?

A. Yes, this is considered a qualifying life event, and certain benefit changes can be made outside of annual Open Enrollment.

Q. Can I still cover my domestic partner or my domestic partner's children as dependents on my life, AD&D, or LTD policies?

A. No. Only state-registered domestic partners and their children will be eligible for benefits.

Q. Can I still list my domestic partner as a beneficiary on my life, AD&D, or LTD policies?

A. Yes. King County employees may select anyone they wish as beneficiaries. No action is required to keep your current domestic partner and/or your domestic partner's children as beneficiaries on your life and disability policies.

Q. What medical coverage options are available for dropped dependents?

A. Domestic partners and their children who are losing medical coverage on Dec. 31, 2017, can extend coverage by self-paying for [COBRA](#) or by purchasing other insurance through a health plan or the [Washington Health Benefit Exchange](#).

Q. How will this change affect the domestic partner of an employee who has left County employment, retired, or dropped coverage?

A. Dependents who lose coverage as part of this change will receive the right to continue coverage through self-payment of COBRA. This would also apply to those already receiving coverage under COBRA or Retiree Medical.

Q. Who can become Washington state-registered domestic partner?

A. To register as domestic partners in Washington, both partners must confirm the following on the [Declaration of State Registered Domestic Partnership](#):

- You share a common residence;
- At least one partner is age 62 or older;
- The other partner must be age 18 or older;
- You are not married or in a registered domestic partnership with anyone else;
- You are capable of consenting to the domestic partnership; and
- You are not related nearer than second cousin, and not be a sibling, grandchild, aunt, uncle, niece, or nephew to the other partner.

Q. What will happen to the taxation of domestic partner benefits?

A. If a domestic partnership remains benefits-eligible after Dec. 31, 2017, benefit taxation through payroll will remain the same. The federal government still does not recognize domestic partners or their children as eligible dependents.

Q. How will this change impact my domestic partner's participation in the Healthy Incentives program?

A. Non-state-registered domestic partners can continue to enjoy this year's Healthy Incentives program, however, participation is not necessary. Your 2018 color level will be based solely on your participation in this year's program.

Q. Can my domestic partner still use the Making Life Easier program?

A. Yes. Anyone living in an employee's household, or claimed as a dependent on their IRS tax forms is eligible for the Making Life Easier program.

Q. Why was this change made?

A. King County benefits were originally extended to domestic partners to correct an inequity in benefits provided to same-sex couples. At that time, same-sex marriage was prohibited in Washington. Same-sex couples now have the right to legally marry and now have the same benefits and tax advantages as other married couples. King County and its labor unions determined that offering benefits only to state-registered domestic partners would help mitigate the effects of rising health care costs while creating consistency with state law.

Q. Where can I get more information?

A. Washington State Domestic Partner Registry: sos.wa.gov/corps/domesticpartnerships/#/home
Washington Secretary of State FAQ: sos.wa.gov/corps/domesticpartnerships/faq-2014.aspx
King County Benefits Website: kingcounty.gov/audience/employees/benefits.aspx